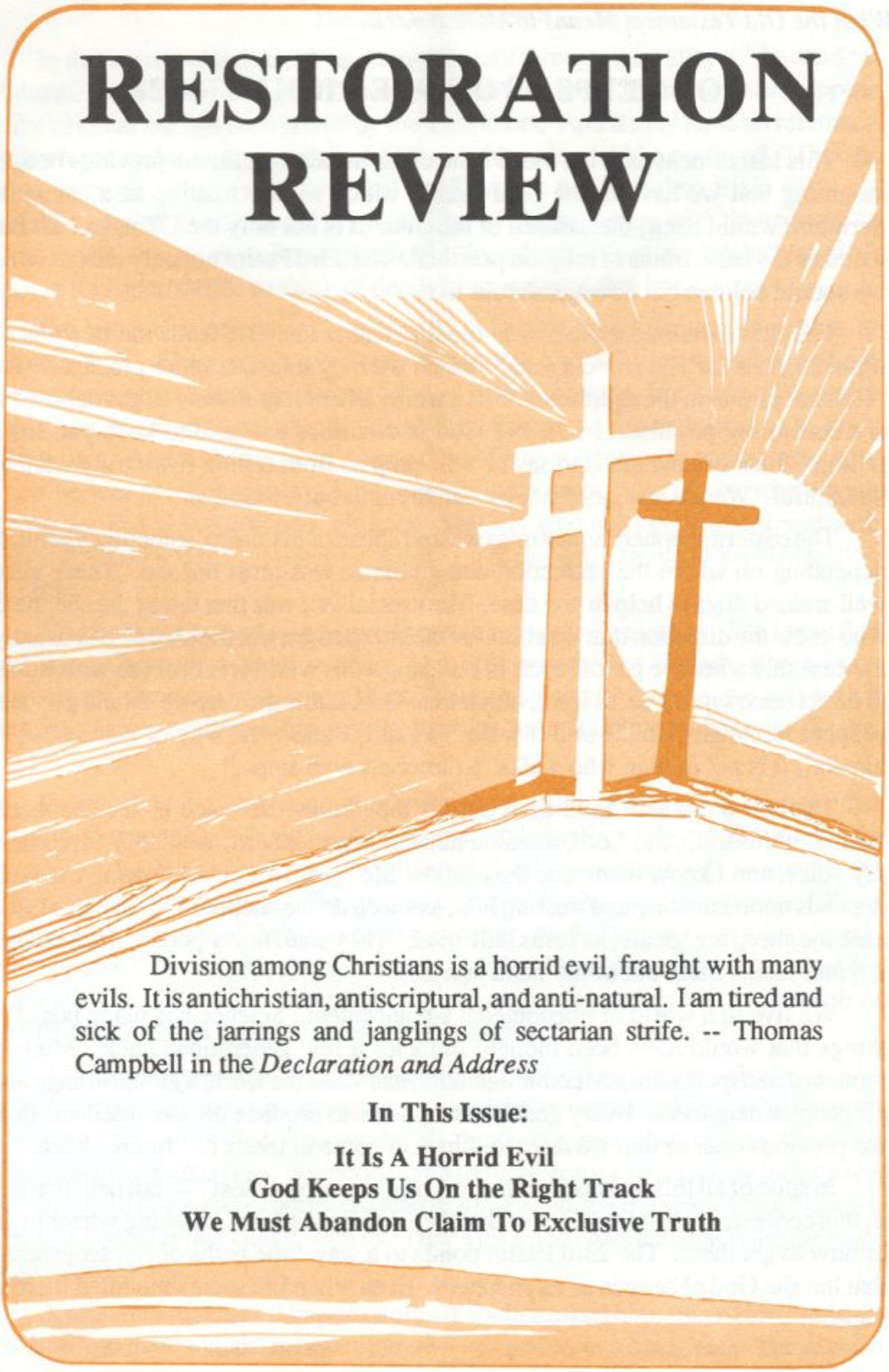
RESTORATION REVIEW



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What the Old Testament Means to Us. . No. 12

GOD KEEPS US ON THE RIGHT TRACK

This installment on what the OT means to us, along with the previous one, is assuming that we have in the 23rd Psalm, which we are treating as a canon of Scripture within itself, the essence of religion. It is not only the OT at its best but it makes the basic truths of religion practical. The 23rd Psalm not only tells us what we should believe but how we should live.

The first installment took us to the line that reads, “He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name’s sake,” which we may translate more practically as, “God keeps me on the right track.” In a world where it is so easy to get derailed it is a reassuring promise. In the NT God is described as “able to keep you from falling” (Jude 24), which is to say he will keep us from falling if we truly want to be faithful. We are sustained not by our strength but by God’s.

The eastern shepherd sometimes walked ahead of his sheep, sometimes behind, depending on where the protection and guidance was most needed. There were well-trained dogs to help in any case. The crucial fact was that it was the shepherd who knew the direction that was best for the sheep to go, not the sheep. It is usually the case that when we get off track in our dangerous world it is because we assume to direct our own course, as if we, rather than God, know the way we should go. The prophet Jeremiah (10:23) said it well, “O Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps.”

The sheep are safe from peril only if they know the voice of the shepherd. Aware of this truth, our Lord, likening himself to a shepherd, said, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow Me” (Jn. 10:27). Following the Lord depends upon knowing and trusting him, as sheep do the shepherd. When this is the case the sheep are secure, as Jesus indicated, “They shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of my hand” (v. 28).

We live in a world of phenomenal advancement. Science has made possible things that would have been thought miracles a few generations back. Modem modes of transportation and communication has made the world a global village and all peoples neighbors. Every generation appears to produce greater intellects than the previous one, so that we refer to things to come in terms of “future shock.”

In spite of all this most people in the world seem to be “lost”—not hell-fire lost in this context, but lost in the sense that they are derailed, not knowing where to go or how to get there. The 23rd Psalm points to away, “the paths of righteousness” that has the God of heaven as its shepherd. Even when life seems muddled there is hope.

The Shadow of Death

In that memorable line, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me” the word “death” does not appear in the original but has been added by the translators. And it may have no reference to death per se, but to any and all of life’s troubles. It could be rendered, “Though I pass through a gloomy valley, I fear no harm,” as the Jerusalem Bible has it. It. could be applied to a financial crisis, a siege of illness, a bout with depression, or a loss of self-esteem as well as to death, but since death is to many the darkest of all valleys it is appropriate to think of death when we read this line.

The shepherds of ancient Palestine had their dark and dangerous valleys to contend with. Their sheep were prey to robbers and wild beasts alike, and the weather was often beastly in ravines 500 feet below sea level. In creating this psalm David remembered those gloomy passes and compared the experiences to life’s difficulties. And sometimes, of course, David’s own life was at stake, especially when he was being stalked by King Saul in those same hills. Even when death threatened David was unafraid. He knew that God, who was his shepherd, was with him and would see him through. It is religion at its best, a tremendous affirmation of faith.

This does not mean that religion is insurance against calamity. We know that bad things happen to good people. Not only sorrow but tragedy (there is an important difference) befall most of us. This psalm recognizes that we may be led through gloomy ravines oflife, even calamities, but it is telling us that it is OK, that God is with us.

People have a misconception of prayer and religion when they suppose that because God is their “Shield” and “Fortress” and that they take refuge “under the shadow of his wings,” all apt metaphors of God’s care, they will be spared the tragedies that befall others. The man who prayed for his son away at war, “Keep my son safe, a Lord. Hide him under your wings. No bullet can pierce thy wings,” runs the risk of being disappointed with God, for the soldiers who are prayed for often also die. God does not promise to keep us from tragedies, only to be with us amidst them. In the light of eternity that is enough.

And yet we know that God does sometimes deliver us from the shadows. It is sometimes through surgery, medicine, counseling, or common sense. The promise of Rom. 8:28 is not that God works all things for good, but that in all things (including bad things)

God is working with us (cooperating) for good, which means he helps us to make bad experiences lead to some good, even if years down the road. The key to it all is that God is with us. That's the good news and that is the message of the 23rd Psalm.

A war story captures this great truth. A soldier asked his captain if he could go out into "no man's land" between the trenches and rescue his friend. The captain told him he could go but that it would do no good, for his friend was probably already dead and he would endanger his own life. The soldier went out amidst the fire and managed to hoist his friend on his shoulder and bring him back. When the two of them tumbled to the bottom of the trench, the captain said tenderly to the would-be rescuer, "I told you it wouldn't be worth it. Your friend is dead and you are mortally wounded." The soldier told the captain that it was worth it, for before his friend died he said, "I knew you'd come."

The hero did not save his friend from death, but he was with him when he was needed and he tempered the pain with his love. In the shadows there was radiant joy. This is what the psalmist is saying. In life's shadows God is with us and this turns fear into joy.

His Rod and Staff

"Your rod and your staff, they comfort me" refers to the discipline God imposes upon his people. The shepherd's rod was really a club about two feet long with a knob at one end through which nails might be driven. A noose was threaded through a hole at the other end so that the shepherd could secure the club to his wrist when using it. It was a weapon of defense to ward off wild beasts or robbers.

The club became a metaphor of God's demanding discipline, as in Rev. 2:27, "He shall rule them with a rod of iron." Micah 7:14, "Shepherd Your people with your rod (club)" means that God does whatever is necessary to take care of his people. The club was also a symbol of authority, referring to God's sovereignty. The mace, derived from the ancient club, is now used ceremonially as a sign of authority.

The staff was a pole about six feet long with a crook at one end, which is the back-drop for a bishop's or pope's pastoral staff today. It had many uses, such as using it as a pole vault to ford streams, beating down leaves from trees to feed the flock, and punish unruly sheep. If a sheep wandered into deep undergrowth where there were snakes or onto a precipice where it might fall, the shepherd would push the crooked end of his staff between the sheep's hind legs, give it a twist and pull the animal to safety. The staff thus brought "comfort" to the sheep in a tough kind of way.

God deals with us with both club and staff, which means he disciplines in our sin and prods us in our lethargy. Sin is the enemy that will destroy us. It is easy for us to take sin lightly. But God deals with sin in our lives with the wrath of a big club. God is hostile to

everything in the world that is evil,just as the shepherd is set against anything that would destroy the sheep. Sin has awesome consequences. By way of rod and staff God would spare us from sin's destructiveness. So, he sometimes shows tough love towards us. But in the end it is comforting.

The rest of the psalm puts finishing touches to the theme thus far: that God is with us; he loves and cares for us; he is there when we need him; he disciplines us. The line that reads, "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies," seems to shift from a pastoral scene to a banquet hall, and refers to some fugitive rather than sheep. But if we allow "table" to simply mean meal, which it sometimes does in the Bible, then the sheep image remains and we do not have to think of a table in some building. The enemies referred to might be poisonous weeds and lurking snakes. So, the scene is of the shepherd finding safe, nutritious grass in a wide table-like field for the sheep, all the while guarding the sheep from all their enemies.

"You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over" refers to the sheep being taken to the sheepfold when day is done and treated for the wounds inflicted by a hazardous environment. Feet were worn tender by the sharp rocks and the flesh torn by thorns. Fevers were common. The shepherd would stand at the door of the sheepfold and call the sheep to him. Examining each one, he would apply soothing oil where needed. A cup of water was there to assuage the thirst, a cup that ran over because of the continual flow of a trickling stream.

There is an enormous spiritual lesson in all this in that it shows what God will allow to happen to us and what he will not allow to happen. He allows us to get hungry, but there are the green pastures. He allows us to wander but not too far. We will walk through dark shadows but he is with us. We may get bruised and battered, buy he applies soothing oil. He allows us to be tested but not destroyed.

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life" probably refers to the dogs that assisted the shepherd, named Goodness and Mercy, not unlikely names for the beloved sheep dogs that were of such great help to the shepherd. David sees the Lord as his shepherd, leading the way to paths of righteousness, then there was God's goodness and mercy, like faithful sheep dogs, bringing up the rear. Some poets have likened God to "the Hound of Heaven" who is continually in pursuit of his wayward sheep.

Finally, there is "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever," which almost certainly continues the pastoral imagery. David is not talking about going to heaven, but being with God the Great Shepherd in the sheepfold, safe and secure with him. Tomorrow he will go out again to green pastures, still waters, and, yes, dark valleys. But God is always with him, and that is God's house, where God is. Tomorrow night he will again be

in some sheepfold, going in and out, but always with God. So, “I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever” was to David the shepherd boy an affirmation of faith that wherever or whatever he will always be in the presence of God.

One wonders if our Lord was influenced by these thoughts when he said: “I am the door of the sheepfold. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture” (Jn. 10:9).

Do not both David and Jesus see “at home with God” or being in the sheepfold not a state of inert repose but a continual going in and out in service to God and in the presence of God, forever and ever.—*the Editor*

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Highlights in Restoration History. . .

IT IS A HORRID EVIL!

Division among Christians is a horrid evil. fraught with many evils. It is antichristian, antiscriptural. anti-natural. - Thomas Campbell in the *Declaration and Address*

Consider these circumstances, all within my recent experiences and common to us all:

A Church of Christ preacher expressing his longing for fellowship in a wider circle of Christians but unable to do so because of the exclusivism of his own people.

A Christian Church minister expressing his lifelong desire to preach at a Church of Christ, but has never been able to do so because of the lines drawn between the two churches.

A prominent Church of Christ minister telling a church in Dallas: “I have been criticized more for the speaking engagements I’ve had in other churches than all the other things I’ve ever done, and I’ve done a lot of shady things.”

People leaving the Churches of Christ/Christian Churches because of the debilitating sectarianism they find. It is common for people to suffer painful rejection if they dare to reach out to other believers.

Our young people grow up never having any fellowship with the youth in other churches. It is as if the other Christian young people did not even exist.

These are a few instances within the Restoration Movement. When one views the larger Christian world, which is what Thomas Campbell was referring to in the above quotation, these scenarios are common:

Families divided among themselves religiously. At homecomings people who long to share their faith can't talk about the Lord or the church. Small talk is OK, but nothing spiritual.

Preachers in the same town have no contact, no fellowship, nothing, even though they need each other immensely and have so much in common.

Churches in the same community, often tiny congregations, struggle on year after year, each trying to pay its bills and have a viable witness in the community, without any help from each other. If three or four such churches could unite they could have an effective ministry in their small community. No way; it is not even considered.

The world over denominations duplicate each other's efforts as if they were rivals: separate headquarters, seminaries, societies, publishing endeavors, outreach programs. Money, time, manpower wasted.

Missionary efforts are often stymied by divisions in the field. Ghandi once chided missionaries to India that if they wanted to impress Indians they should go home, become united, and return with one message.

The scandal among Christians all through the centuries has been that they have presented the spectacle of a divided church to a lost world, contradicting the prayer of their own Lord that they will be one so that the world will believe.

It is to Thomas Campbell's credit that he found divisions among Christians as intolerable among people that took them for granted. He cried out in righteous indignation that he was "sick and tired of the bitter jarrings and janglings of a party spirit." He resolved to work for peace among the churches. This led him to launch the movement to unite the Christians in all the sects. He saw this not as his own cause, or the cause of any party, but, as he put it, "it is a common cause, the cause of Christ and our brethren of all denominations."

His reference to "brethren of all denominations" shows that he had no illusions about those of his own movement being the only Christians. What motivated him was not that there were no other Christians, but that they were divided.

Campbell had a way of exposing partyism as the folly that it is. In that same document on unity, the *Declaration and Address*, he wrote: "There are no divisions in the grave, nor in that world that lies beyond it! There our divisions must come to an end! We

must all unite there! Would to God that we could fmd it in our hearts to put an end to our short-lived divisions here."

It is compelling logic. If we are to be one in heaven, why can't we be one upon earth? If parties will not be tolerated in heaven, why should we allow them upon earth? This came to be part of the Campbell plea, that division among Christians is a sin against heaven. Unity is a mandate from God.

There is a subtle contradiction in what Campbell says about a divided church, for in his first principle on unity in that same document he writes, "The Church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one." But the apostle Paul seems to do the same when he excoriates the church at Corinth for its schisms and then asks rhetorically, "Is Christ divided?"

There is implied here in both Paul and Campbell the hidden unity of the church, even in the face of schism. Just as Christ cannot be divided his Body, the church, cannot be other than one. They are both saying that unity is real but not realized. The church is in its essence one; it just isn't behaving that way. Like a marriage in trouble, the problem is not a lack of essential oneness but of drawing upon the blessings on that oneness.

Divisions among Christians is a horrid evil, fraught with many evils! An angry Thomas Campbell said it well. It inflicts pain and sorrow and incites enmity and strife. It divides families asunder. It separates believers in Christ into warring camps or at least causes them to treat each other with benign neglect. It impedes the church's mission in reaching a lost world. It wastes resources. The three adjectives that Campbell used to describe the evil of division are incisive: antichristian, antiscriptural, and anti-natural. To say that division is antichristian is to say it violates the principle of love laid down by Christ that believers are to love each other even as he loves them. This is how the world will know that they are truly Christ's disciples (Jn. 13:35).

It is antiscriptural in that it violates the Biblical mandate that we preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. The Bible clearly lists "factions, parties, divisions" as works of the flesh along with idolatry, adultery, and murder (Gal. 5:20). It is anti-natural in that it impedes our noblest instincts to reach out and accept others as equals. It keeps us from being gracious and magnanimous, which is a yearning deep within all of us.

This intolerance toward partyism and sectism is a virtue of our heritage that we must recapture. We do not treat it as the heinous sin that it is. In fact we use division among Christians as a convenient way to solve problems. If we don't agree and can't get along we separate. The consequence is that we know little about forbearing love, which Paul names in Eph. 4:2 as the way to preserve the unity that the Spirit bestows as a gift.

The call for forbearance implies differences and difficulties. When we demand conformity there is nothing to forbear. And when our attitude is “Agree with me or leave or I’ll leave” we reject that forbearing love which “binds everything together in perfect harmony” even when there are differences (Col. 3:14). Our pioneers had a motto that said it well, “We are free to differ but not to divide.” What a heritage we have if we would but keep it!—*the Editor*

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Overcoming the Party Spirit

We can conquer the party spirit just as we can overcome any other work of the flesh. In spite of its insidious nature we are no more doomed to continue in it than we would be to continue to drink to excess. It is as important that we divest ourselves of it as that we free ourselves from impurity, idolatry or sorcery. In order to do so we must want to be free from it. We must recognize it for what it is, a sin against God and a scandal against the bride of his Son. So long as we cloak this sin with the garment of respectability we will not escape from it.

We must apply ourselves to overcoming the baneful effects of the sectarian attitude by starting in to undo our errors. This means we must begin to associate with those from whom we were separated and commend our love unto them. This requires no change of position on the troublesome issues. It only requires a recognition of our mutual brotherhood in Christ.—*W. Carl Ketcherside*

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We Must Abandon Claim to Exclusive Truth. . .

WHAT MUST THE CHURCH OF CHRIST DO TO BE SAVED? (12)

There is a liberating truth that would go far in saving the Church of Christ from the obscurant course it has followed during the century of its existence: *We can believe we are right without having to believe that everyone else is wrong.* For one hundred years, ever since it was bequeathed to us by well-meaning but misguided leaders at Sand Creek, Illinois in 1889, the Church of Christ has been hamstrung by the fallacy that if we surrender our claim to exclusive truth we forfeit our right to exist. If we are right, everyone

else has to be wrong. Not so. If we are true and faithful Christians, then no one else is. That does not follow. Our *raison d'etre* depends upon our being the one and only true church. Wrong again. We have been sold a bill of goods by those who would make us a fissiparous sect forever engaged in the "jarrings and janglings of sectarian strife," to quote Thomas Campbell.

We must first of all realize that this claim to exclusive truth was not the position held by the pioneers of the Restoration Movement. They launched "a movement to unite the Christians in all the sects," a goal that clearly implied that there were Christians in the sects. One of their mottoes was, "We are Christians only but not the only Christians." It was never their claim that they were the only Christians, the only true church, and they were not exclusivists. Alexander Campbell left the Presbyterians and was "forced out" (as he saw it) by the Baptists, but he never broke fellowship with either and always considered them Christians. And in his famous Lunenburg Letter he said if there were no Christians in the sects there were none anywhere.

It is a little known fact that the first congregations of the Campbell movement, Brush Run and Wellsburg (both in Virginia near Bethany, Campbell's home) were members of a Baptist association of churches, the first the Redstone association, the second the Mahoning association. A third congregation in Pittsburg, led by Thomas Campbell, sought membership in a Presbyterian presbytery and was turned down. Alexander Campbell frequently spoke for various denominations, and their clergy were often visitors in his home and spoke at the college he founded on his own farm. When he went to Nashville to oppose Jesse Ferguson, the Church of Christ minister who was conducting seances with the dead, he first spoke at the Methodist church where he was introduced by the bishop who offered support for the difficult task he had in their city.

All this stands in bold contrast to the Church of Christ today where a preacher. is suspect if he has any such contact with other believers. For example, Bill Banowsky, a prominent Church of Christ minister, has in recent years been guest speaker at various denominations. He told a class at the Highland Oaks Church of Christ in Dallas, in a splendid lesson on unity that I heard on tape, that he had been criticized more for his visits to other churches than anything else he had ever done, and he added that he had done a lot of shady things. When the elders of a church in south Texas heard that brother Banowsky had preached for a Methodist church, they cancelled the appointment he had at their church.

This is by no means atypical among Churches of Christ. All these years it has been an accepted fact that whatever cooperative effort the churches in a town may promote they cannot count on the Church of Christ helping out. It is rare for a Church of Christ minister

to participate in the ministerial association, and if he takes part in a city-wide Easter or Thanksgiving service he does so at his own risk. A person may spend a lifetime in a Church of Christ without ever hearing anyone from any other church, and except for weddings and funerals never visit any other church. We have no fellowship with other churches and other Christians (period).

And yet we claim to be a unity-minded people and heirs of a unity movement. How can we have an effective unity plea when we have nothing to do with anyone else?

Not only is our exclusivism at odds with our own heritage in the Stone-Campbell movement, it is also contrary to the teaching of Christ, who was not an exclusivist. And he taught his disciples that they were not to be absolutists. Mark 9:38-40 tells how one of the disciples said to Jesus, “Teacher, we saw someone who does not follow us casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow us.” It was one of those things that pride often dictates—if someone is not “of us” he does not count. This was the ideal time for Jesus to call for a narrow view if such was his intention.

His response must have startled the disciples who by then supposed they had the exclusive claim to truth and the only ones qualified to teach it. “Do not forbid him,” Jesus told them “for no one who works a miracle in My name can soon afterward speak evil of Me.” He went on to speak a truth we are slow to learn: “He who is not against us is on our side.” We might be surprised how many there are that Jesus would accept as on his side.

It is one thing for us to believe in absolute truth, which we all do since we believe in God, but it is something much different for us to presume that we have an absolute understanding of that truth. Truth is absolute, our grasp of truth is relative. One sobering truth speaks to that: “For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known” (1 Cor. 13:12). So, we can surrender our claim to exclusive truth (only we have all the truth) and still believe in absolute truth (which is a reality that is beyond our perfect understanding).

On the face of it, we are forced to conclude that we *must* abandon our claim to exclusive truth in order to be an authentic people. We have no right to exist believing that we and we only have the truth. We must admit that we are both fallible and finite, that we, like everyone else, are wrong about some things and ignorant about other things. We must include ourselves in Alexander Pope’s wise dictum: “To err is human, to forgive is divine.” The Bible mandates that we acknowledge our ignorance: “If anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know” (lCor.8:2). The next verse shows that what is really important is not whether we know God but whether he knows us!

And yet we can believe, in common with all Christians, that we have found many precious truths that we live for and would die for. It is not so much that we *know* certain truth, for "Knowledge puffs up while love builds up," but that we *believe* that truth and act upon it in love. We are not saved by knowledge but by faith that works by love.

There are some compelling reasons why the Church of Christ must abandon its claim to exclusive truth:

l. *Such a claim is seen by others as rude. arrogant, and self-righteous, and it hinders people from hearing us with an open mind.*

Fair-minded people understandably resent those who believe they are right and everyone else is wrong. All through the years we have been accused of believing we are the only ones going to heaven, that we are the only Christians and the only true church. This is not only rude and arrogant but nonsense, for the Church of Christ, counting all its factions, comprise less than one-tenth of one percent of the hundreds of millions that make up the Christian world. Furthermore, such a view dechristianizes many of the noblest, most dedicated believers who have sacrificed for the cause of Christ more than ourselves.

2. *Such a claim makes us look ridiculously inconsistent when we draw upon the labors of other Christians and yet say they are not Christians.*

We sing the great hymns of Martin Luther ("A Mighty Fortress Is Our God"), John Henry Newman, who was a Roman Catholic bishop ("Lead, Kindly Light"), and Charles Wesley, one of the founders of Methodism ("I know That My Redeemer Lives"). We use translations of the Bible produced through the centuries by the church at large. We study the commentaries and read the books of scholars that do not even know about the Church of Christ. We send our missionaries to the language schools of the various denominations and our college professors are educated at seminaries and universities of various churches. This is "taxation without salvation"!

3. *Such a claim contradicts the Bible in that it implies that Christ had no church upon the earth and that there were no Christians during most of the past two thousand years.*

It is disarming to our people when they realize that what they call "the Church of Christ" is only a century old, and the Restoration Movement out of which it emerged is only two centuries old. Our claim to exclusive truth cancels 1900 years of history: no church, no Christians! Not even William Tyndale who was burned at the stake in 1536 for translating the Bible into English. Our Lord made it clear that the gates of hell would not prevail against his church, and we know from history that his church has always been around, "living still in spite of dungeon, fire, and sword." This makes it clear that

distinction must be made between “the Church of Christ upon earth” that Thomas Campbell talked about and the Yellow-Pages Church of Christ.

4. *Such a claim makes separatists of the Church of Christ and makes it impossible for it to be part of a unity movement.*

There is no way for us to make an effective plea for unity so long as we assume an exclusivistic posture. Other believers will ignore us so long as we refuse to have any fellowship with them. We can only preach conformity (“Be like us; we are the true church!”); we cannot plead for unity (“Let’s join hands and grow closer to Christ together!). And yet unity is our heritage. We must plead for unity in diversity, which is the only kind of unity there is, and for disagreement without division, which is the only way to “preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,” which is a Biblical charge.

5. *Such a claim stands on the false premise that there can be perfect knowledge and perfect obedience.*

This has been our undoing in the Church of Christ. We have to be right about everything, with every *i* dotted and every *t* crossed. We have not come to terms with the grace of God. This is why we can never be sure of our salvation. We try and try harder, but we are never sure. Once we realize that acceptance with God is not a matter of our goodness or our works or our perfect knowledge and obedience, but a matter of surrendering to God’s grace, we will abandon our claim to exclusive truth.

The good news in all this is that there are many, perhaps a majority, in the Church of Christ that arc already abandoning our claim to exclusive truth. It is the leadership that is hesitant. A growing number are realizing that their *raison d’etre* does not depend upon the naive claim that we have a monopoly upon God’s truth.

We have impelling reasons to exist as the Church of Christ, the most significant being that ours is a unity heritage and we are to be busy promoting the cause of the unity of all believers. We are within the tradition of Barton W. Stone whose motto was, “Let Christian unity be our polar star.”

Along with being a unity movement, we exist in order to be a productive part of the Body of Christ, filled with the Spirit and bearing its fruit of love, joy, and peace. We exist in order to be an intelligent and responsible community of believers sensitive to the needs of a suffering world. We exist in order to become more and more like Christ by being a servant community. We exist in order to help redeem fallen humanity by being the salt of the earth and the light of the world. And always a pilgrim church, whose home is not in this world, that is living *in* time *but for* eternity.

All this is our *raison d'etre* and it is more meaningful when we see ourselves, not as a church that has exclusive truth, but as a people always in search of truth, especially as it is revealed in Jesus Christ. And always eager to accept other Christians as equals and join with them in the unending search for more and more truth.—*the Editor*

"COME OUT, MY PEOPLE"

Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins. and lest you receive of her plagues.—Rev. 18:4

Come out! This is a cry often heard in Scripture, and it is always addressed to God's people. But it is never used to call God's people away from other of God's people. Christians, for example, are never summoned to separate themselves from other Christians. Believers, however faithful they may be, are never beckoned to "Come out" from a church, however unfaithful it may be.

One of the most unfaithful of churches, Sardis, which is described as "dead" in Rev. 3:1, had a few that "walk with Me in white." The Lord did not tell them to leave and start a faithful church. There were many things wrong with the church at Corinth, so much so that Paul called them "carnal," but there was no call for the faithful to leave and start a "loyal" congregation across town.

There is hardly any Scripture that is twisted and warped as much as this one, and all for the purpose of defending "factions, parties, divisions" which in Gal. 5:20 are included among the works of the flesh. Our people sometimes use the passage to exclude and excoriate some sister or brother whom they have labeled as "liberal" and want to get rid of. "Come out!" from him or her, they demand, and quote Rev. 18:4. I recall such an instance in Miami, Florida among our black Churches of Christ. There was a black brother who was branded by "those who are somewhat" as a false teacher for believing that Martin Luther King was a Christian, even if a Baptist, and for believing there are Christians besides those in the Church of Christ. He even held that instrumental music is not necessarily a sin even though his own congregation chose to sing acappella.

The leading black preachers put him on trial and eventually withdrew fellowship from him. Among their proof texts for brutalizing their own brother in Christ was Rev. 18:4 and a similar passage in 2 Cor 6:17 that reads: "Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you."

It was my privilege to defend the besieged brother during his trial. This was easy to do, not only because the case against him was based on an irresponsible handling of Scripture, but also because his life was exemplary, more than the lives of his accusers. His elders and many from his congregation were on hand to support him. It was evident that he hardly fit the description of "a habitation of demons" or "what is unclean" referred to in the proof texts.

I told the preachers, who had no business putting a brother on trial in the first place, that they were abusing the Bible as well as their brother. They were taking passages that referred to the idolatry and debauchery of pagan Rome and applying them to their own brother in Christ. Paul and John were quoting from Isaiah in telling Christians to "Come out." Isaiah was bidding the Jews, God's captive people in Babylon, to come out of their captivity and return to their home land. In 2 Cor. 6 the apostle is referring to believers that are unequally yoked with disbelievers and who are banqueting in temples of idols. The plea to "Come out and be separate" was a call to Christians to renounce idolatry, paganism, lawlessness, and all that Paul meant by darkness. The apostle would be shocked that this passage would ever be used to separate Christians from each other.

In Rev. 18:4 John applies Isaiah's words to pagan Rome whom he describes as "a habitation of demons, a prison of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hated bird." He goes on to say that "all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her." So, it is clear that when he goes on to say, quoting a voice out of heaven, "Come out of her, my people," that he beckons God's people to free themselves from the evil influence of "Babylon," which stands for pagan Rome.

How could we have ever used these passages to separate Christian from Christian? Too often in our own Restoration history "Come out of Babylon' was a call for other believers to leave their denominations and join us. It is just as well that most of that is now behind us, and we can now give serious consideration to what the "Come out" passages mean to us in our kind of world. There is reason to believe that they are enormously relevant.

The word most often used in the New Testament to describe the Christian is related to this "Come out" principle. It is the word that points to our separation from the world. *Hagios* is a Greek word that conveys the idea of being separate, different, apart from the world. It means to be holy, saintly. In such verses as Philip. 4:21 ("Greet every saint in Christ Jesus") it is applied to every believer and not only to those who are especially holy. In Rev. 18:20 the apostles are called "holy apostles," but in Rom. 1:7 we are all "called to be saints" or holy. In the NT believers are called saints more than anything else, and that

word could be translated “separated ones” or “called out ones.” Sanctification comes from the same word. We are set apart by God’s grace to serve him in holiness. This is what Heb. 12:14 means: “Pursue peace with all men and holiness (sanctification) without which no one will see the Lord.”

That is an amazing passage. If it read “Without baptism no one will see the Lord,” our folk would know it by heart, but when it says we will not see the Lord without being holy we pay it little mind. Heb. 10:10 is another neglected passage: “By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” We are made holy by God’s act of grace on the Cross, not by any merit or goodness on our part. One may be flawed and marred by sin and still be holy in that God has made him so. We are of course to grow and become more conformed to Christ’s likeness in bearing the fruit of the Spirit, but it is always by grace that we are “washed, sanctified, justified” (1 Cor. 6:11). That was written to a church that was far from perfect, but still they were “sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints” (1 Cor. 1:2).

In one of our assemblies recently the presiding brother meant well when he humbly insisted that “We are not holy, only trying to be.” He was wrong on both counts. We are holy if we are God’s people, but we are never holy by trying to be. Sometimes a brother will even say publicly, apparently trying to show humility, “I am a miserable sinner.” Wrong again. We are not miserable sinners if our lives have been touched by God’s grace and set apart (made holy) for his purposes. Redeemed! What wonderful grace, grace that is greater than all my sins! If it is true, we are no longer miserable sinners.

Get thee out! is God’s call to his people that goes all the way back to Abraham: “Now the Lord God said to Abraham, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I shall show thee” (Gen. 12:1). It is the call that God’s people have found difficult to obey, including Abraham who could not bear leaving his father behind. The prophets urged God’s people to “Escape out of Babylon” (Jer. 50:8), but there was but a remnant who responded to the call. Once we settle in and become conformed to our world we find the call to “Come out” too much. We may pay lip service to the idea, but to really do it in heart and mind is something else.

The call to be a people set apart from the world takes different forms, as in I Tim. 5:22: “Be not partakers of other men’s sins; keep thyself pure.” There is always the pressure to conform and to be like the world, but the “Come out” call also says: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rom. 12:2). This means that we do not prove the Christian faith by argument or even by having a “successful” church, but by changed lives.

Renewed minds! It shows that the mind matters. We may be in the very heart of the world's traffic, but we do not allow its allurements or its false values to deceive us. While we are in the world and in an important sense love the world (as God did in giving his own son) we are always aloof from it. We hear a different drum beat. The call to "Come out" still comes to each of us who dares to be what the Bible most often calls us, saints.—*the Editor*

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UNITING OR ACCEPTING?

Cecil Hook

We are hearing of unity meetings in which the participants work to break down the walls that separate our differing groups. Those efforts are to be commended and encouraged. What I am about to say is not intended to be overly critical of them.

Instead of having unity meetings, however, should we not be having accepting meetings? God has already created the unity. All who are in Christ are in one body. The church is one and cannot be divided into two or more churches or bodies. When we separate into groups because of our differences, we only become sectarian. The person who rejects other brothers and sisters in Christ is sectarian in spirit and practice. It is not the meeting in different groups that is sinful but it is the refusing to recognize others who are in God's family. God put us in the same body; let us learn to accept each other.

If we are in Christ, we are children of God and members of his spiritual family. He has only one family. Our efforts should not be directed toward creating one family of God but to the accepting of other brothers and sisters whom God has given us in the family he has already created. It is a sin against the father to reject his other children.

In the parable about the prodigal son, the father had a united family even while the prodigal was away and also after his return. The two sons were brothers in the same family of the same father all the time. Upon the return of the profligate one, the older brother rejected him. They were still brothers but one judged the other to be unworthy when he should have left the judging to the father. The father had accepted him fully. We condemn ourselves when we judge and turn away from our brother.

It was the brother who was so obedient, good, and right who was the greater disappointment. His rejection of his brother, if sustained, would be more of a long-range threat to the family than the sins of the flesh of the brother. The sins of immorality were

repented of, but the parable leaves us with a self-righteous older brother who thought he was too good to stoop to receive his brother who had erred.

That is the same kind of rejecting attitude that plagues the older brothers in God's family today.

To have accepted the errant brother back would not have given endorsement to his pig-pen conduct. Brotherhood did not originate from nor depend upon their conduct, but it was the result of having the same father. Surely, the young son had lived a filthy life of which neither the father nor the son could approve. But the father was the only one who could rightly judge, disinherit, or disclaim him. The older brother was stuck with him!

In the dead church at Sardis there were a few good brothers who had not wandered into the far country. "Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments." The delinquent ones were called upon to repent, but the older brothers were not called upon to judge and reject them.

Brothers do not decide to fellowship each other in order to unite in the father's family. It is not fellowship him and then unite with him, but rather recognize the fellowship that the family relationship creates.

Should the Church of Christ accept the Christian Church, and visa versa? No, for acceptance is an individual matter. Each of us must accept all the children of God without regard to the particular names worn to distinguish their sectarian exclusiveness.

Children of God are separated into splintered groups. When the various individuals in these churches accept other brothers and sisters across our divisive lines, we can come to appreciate that there is one body, one church.

Since all who are in the one body do not accept each other, it seems appropriate that we have accepting meetings in order to work toward healing the sores caused by our sin of alienation. But since acceptance is not a corporate action, you need not wait for meetings to bring it about. Just begin individually to accept all of God's children with whom he has united you in one body.—*1350 Huisache. New Braunfels. TX 78130*

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OUR CHANGING WORLD

Since our last report Ouida has had a bout with the respiratory infection that she has periodically, but she is now well. It may be that this perennial problem is an allergy, so we will soon be checking that out. Since Mother Pitts left us we have begun to do things about the house that we had long postponed. We have repainted and recarpeted the upstairs, and we have moved back into our master bedroom which we had given to Mother Pitts. Ouida is now shopping for new curtains, bedspreads, the works. Moving the furniture for the carpet layers was the big job. We have now begun redecorating our kitchen, including new cabinets. We'll soon be ready for you to come to see us, so long as you do not all come at the same time. I am as busy as I've ever been, and I love every minute of it. Apart from the usual routine with this paper, which is a full-time job itself, I am teaching two courses at our congregation, one course at Dallas Christian College, and I've just finished doing the study guide for the World Convention of Churches of Christ to be held in Long Beach in August. I am also revising my history on the Stone-Campbell Movement, which is now out of print. Ouida and I hope to get in some travel this year, *together,* which will be a welcomed change.

Research on the unchurched in our society by the Barna Research Group yielded some interesting facts: 70% of those who never go to church have a favorable impression of Christianity; 83% said there was a time in their lives when they went to church regularly; the unchurched are better educated, with one-third being college graduates; when asked why they did not go to church, the reasons were not strong, such as "no particular reason" or "uninterested." The conclusion was that the unchurched are not interested because they don't see enough value in church attendance to justify the commitment.

The Quaker Ave. Church of Christ in Lubbock, Tx., which is of the non-Sunday School persuasion recently hosted the city-wide Sunday evening service which the Churches of Christ of that city have twice a year. This kind of fellowship between Sunday School and non-SS churches could not have happened a few years back. The Quaker Ave. church is also reaching out to the poor and jobless of their city. Already burdened financially, it appeared that they could do little, but they decided on a special collection strictly "for the poor." The first collection was $1200.00. After a report was made on how that money was used, the next offering was $1800.00 The leaders concluded that folk will sacrifice when they see that the money goes to a good cause and not simply to pay preachers and build buildings.

Harvard recently installed a new president, Neil Rudenstein. In a recent address he said, "If there ever was a time when certain kinds of human values, certain moral values, some spiritual values that transcend individual self-interest and group self-interest were needed, this surely must be such a time." I spent several years at Harvard, but I never saw,

heard, or met the president, but I always presumed he existed. But I don't think the president back then, who as an agnostic scientist was barely tolerant toward his superstitious colleagues at the Divinity School where I studied, would have said what President Rudenstein said.

We sympathize with our sisters and brothers in the Disciples of Christ who went through a traumatic experience in the election of their General Minister and President (GMP) at their recent convention in Tulsa, which one leading Disciple described as "painful and conflictual." To be elected GMP one must receive two-thirds of the delegate votes. Michael Kinnamon, an able seminary dean and a devoted brother with whom I have worked with delight, was the nominee of the church's governing board, but he fell about one percentage point short of the necessary majority, receiving 3600 delegate votes or 65%. This was very disappointing to the majority who saw in Kinnamon a new beginning for the Disciples—"the hard and narrow way for the sake of Christ" as one pastor put it. Others fear "takeover politics" due to vigorous opposition to Kinnamon by the Disciple Renewal, a conservative movement within the church who were accused of busing in people to vote against the nominee (Would it have been OK to bus folk in to vote *for* the nominee?). Kinnamon was opposed mainly because of his liberal views on homosexuality, an issue that has now disturbed virtually every main-line denomination. An interim GMP, C. William Nichols, pastor of the First Christian Church in Decatur, IL., will serve until the General Assembly elects a full-term GMP at its next gathering in 1993. His first act was to send out a prayer that he hopes will be prayed in all the churches, which I will join the Disciples in praying, part of which is, "Help us always to remember that the church is yours—not ours—and that if your gracious spirit governs the church, that spirit will bear in us the fruit of love, joy, and peace." The new moderator of the Disciples of Christ is a woman, Marilyn Moffett, a farmer from Waynetown, Indiana, who apparently presides without controversy.

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READER'S EXCHANGE

Because of our belief that there are indeed Christians in other churches we have moved to another denomination, a Jesus-centered fellowship rather than church-centered. Still deep in my heart is a profound grief that I can't explain, except that I grew up in the Church of Christ. I suffer coldness and rejection of family and friends, but God is my

judge. My hope is that the veil will be lifted, and for that reason I am grateful for your effort to reach those I cannot—*LaNita Hafer, St. Helens, Or.*

Even though I never met Mother Pitts I felt I knew her and we grew to love her through your writings. It is only fitting that she pass on before the paper is stilled, so that those of us who got to know and love her through the paper could read about her beautiful passing. Thank you.—*Dora and Carol Bailey, Ballwin, Mo.*

Since you close shop in December some of your readers may want to know of other journals that deal with reformation. You might tell them about my paper, *The Reformer.*—*Buff Scott, Box 10074, Phoenix, Az. 85064-0074*

(Yes, why don't you give Buff's paper a try? I have been reading it from its inception. The sub rate is only $4.00 a year, or he'll send you a sample copy upon request.—*Ed*.)

It doesn't seem possible that I am sending in renewals for the last time after all these years. Your paper has been a welcomed mend that visits month after month, year after year. I am enriched by her knowledge and wisdom and can pass the same along to others. I will cherish her visits these final few months, and when she is at last put to rest I can console myself that her labors will follow after.—*Harold Shasteen, Centerville, Il.*

Who will take up your prophetic role when *Restoration Review* ceases?—*Michael Hall, Grand Junction, Co.*

Just one more year? You'll just have to publish four times a year after that, or something. We can't do without you!—*Virginia and George Adams, Las Cruces, NM*

Sorry to see this come to a close. Thank you for all the spiritual stimuli you've given us through the years and helping people who disagree to do so in an agreeable manner.—*Phyllis Walker, Ellettsville, In.*

Thank you for your many years of encouragement to live a Spirit-filled life.—*Gene and Joyce Bohenblust, McPherson, Ks.*

I was moved by your report of the death of Mother Pitts. I pray for you and Ouida many more years of productive service in His name.—*Paul DuBois, Arlington, TX*.

(We are encouraged by all the letters expressing appreciation for our labor of love in your behalf all these years. Yes, we will be missing each other. Virginia and George Adams have a point. We should come up with some way of keeping in touch, at least occasionally. The Lord will lead.—*Ed*)

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BOOK NOTES

Anything that Waymon D. Miller, long-time minister and author among Churches of Christ, writes is worth reading. He has a way of dealing with subjects that are generally neglected. Faith healing is an example; it is difficult to find a balanced treatment of that subject. This is why his *Faith Healing: Fact Or Fiction?* is welcomed. We can send you a copy at $11.50 postpaid.

Another challenging book coming out of the Church of Christ is Stephen Sandifer's *Deacons: Male and Female.* Its subtitle is "A Study for Churches of Christ." It argues from Scripture that a church may have no deacons at all, or only male deacons, or deacons male and female, depending on circumstances. A responsible study that we highly recommend. $12.50 postpaid.

We are fortunate that two titles by Louis Cochran are still in print, for he is one of the more interesting and resourceful writers of our history. His *Captives of the Word* is a narrative history of the Stone-Campbell movement and very readable. $13.95 post-paid. Then there is biography of *Raccoon John Smith*, which tells the story of the colorful pioneer preacher and his work for unity. It is also rich in Americana. $11.95 postpaid.

Another book from our own ranks challenges the whole Christian world on one of its most historic doctrines, endless punishment in hell for the wicked. *The Fire That Consumes* by Edward Fudge is a painstaking work that has received high marks from noted scholars. He argues persuasively that what happens to the wicked is what the Bible has said all along, they are destroyed. $21.50 postpaid.

Our supply of back issues is diminishing, but while they last we will send you 14 back issues, selected at random by us, for $5.00 postpaid. We have seven bound volumes that add up to 12 years of this journal for only $70 postpaid. Or you might try only the bound volume for 1989-90, entitled *The Hope of the Believer* at $15.00 postpaid.

Please consider giving us a lift for our last year by sending us a list of new readers. It will help us survive the year and may prove a blessing to the ones you select. While we do not solicit donations, those who choose to help us are to be informed that Restoration Review, in that name, is now qualified for tax-deductible contributions.

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